

Utah Cancer Control Program

Colposcopy Fact Sheet

WHAT IS A COLPOSCOPY?

Colposcopy is the examination of the cervix using a bright light and magnification. This is a safe, painless procedure that allows your health care provider to get a close look at the outside of the cervix.

A colposcopy is commonly done when patients have abnormal Pap test results. It is sometimes used to examine patients who are having bleeding or pain with sexual intercourse.

When necessary, colposcopy is combined with a cervical biopsy, which is the removal of a small piece of tissue from the cervix. Once removed, this tissue is viewed under a microscope and evaluated for cancer or types of cervix lining cells that may be at risk for changing into a cancer.

Cervical cancer is the third most common type of cancer in women. Approximately 2-3% of all women over age 40 years will develop some form of cervical cancer.

HOW IS THIS TEST PERFORMED?

Colposcopy begins much like a regular Pap test. You will remain awake throughout the procedure and may feel minor discomfort.

The speculum is inserted into the vagina and opened so the cervix can be seen. This usually causes slight pressure.

A solution is then applied onto the cervix to make the abnormal cells visible. This solution causes abnormal areas on the cervix to turn white.

Your health care provider then places a colposcope near the opening of the vagina. The colposcope, which

remains outside of the vagina, provides a magnified view of the cervix.

If there are abnormal areas on your cervix, your health care provider may take a biopsy sample using small clippers. You may feel some mild pinching or cramping during a biopsy.

There may be some bleeding from the area where the biopsy sample was removed. This bleeding can usually be stopped with a chemical solution that is dabbed on with a cotton swab. Occasionally a stitch needs to be placed to stop bleeding.

Finally, the opening of the cervix is scraped. This causes some women to feel a sensation like menstrual cramps. The scraping lasts for 30 or 60 seconds.

PAP SMEAR SCHEDULE RECOMMENDATIONS:

*All women over 18 years old (or earlier if sexually active) should have a yearly Pap smear.

*Women should undergo a Pap smear every year

*Women with a history of cervical dysplasia will need Pap smears more frequently.

*Some women can have Pap smears less frequently (every 2-3 years). This option should be discussed with your health care provider